



Lightning



EVERY THUNDERSTORM contains lightning. The electrical charge of a lightning strike, which may reach 300 million volts, searches for the path of least resistance to complete the circuit from the cloud. It might strike you, an isolated tree, or an object in the open. Keep in mind that you do not have to be standing directly beneath a cloud to be struck. Lightning can strike under clear skies as long as the parent thunderstorm cloud is nearby.

Lightning has been called "the underrated killer" since it does not usually get as much headline attention compared to other dangerous weather phenomena. Nationally, about 100 deaths and 500 injuries on average occur as a result of lightning strikes. In a typical year, lightning will strike over 20 million times and will claim more victims than tornadoes or hurricanes. Between 1995 and 2005 in Alabama, 99 injuries and 20 deaths have been attributed to lightning.

Anyone outdoors is particularly vulnerable to lightning. To keep people safe when lightning is in the area, every person, group, or school involved in outdoor activities should have a plan that can be activated. Take time to learn lightning safety rules. A quick dash out in the open with a nearby thunderstorm may unnecessarily expose you to the possibility of being struck. Is it worth the risk?

The 30/30 Lightning Safety Rule could save your life!

The first '30' means that you need to take cover if you hear thunder within 30 seconds of seeing the lightning flash.

The second '30' means that you should wait at least 30 minutes after the last lightning flash or thunder clap to resume normal outdoor activities (the "all clear" signal).

Lightning Safety

- Get indoors in a strong sturdy building! (Most motor vehicles provide good shelter from lightning as well.)
- Stay away from windows.
- Avoid using the phone except for emergencies.
- Avoid high places, open fields, isolated trees, unprotected gazebos, rain or picnic shelters, baseball dugouts, towers, flagpoles, light poles, bleachers, metal fences, convertible vehicles, golfcarts, motorcycles, scooters, and lawn mowers.
- Move away from bodies of water.

- Stay away from metallic objects such as fences, clotheslines, or pipes.
- In open areas, go to a low place such as a ravine or valley. Be alert for flooding.
- In a forest, seek shelter in a low area under a thick growth of small trees.
- If you feel your hair stand on end, lightning may be about to strike you. To lower the chances of getting directly struck, crouch down low, but do not lie flat on the ground.



Remember, there is no truth to the old myth that "lightning never strikes twice in the same place."